NATURAL

TIMBER

COUNTRY

A film by Ron Finne

Introduction

Text

Glossary

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To

The Old-Time Loggers

and their Valued Opponents:

The Great Trees of the

Pacific Northwest

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NATURAL TIMBER COUNTRY is a 53½ minute, color, sound documentary film about old-time loggers and logging in the forests of the Pacific Northwest.

It is a history of logging in the Northwest Big Woods, from before the turn of the century to the present day. More importantly, it is a portrait of logging as a way of life, of old-time loggers who, in their own words and with their own voices, share with us their recollections of the dangers, challenges, fascination, and excitement of working in timber bigger than loggers had ever seen before.

The men talk about working with these huge trees in rough country; they tell jokes and recall their pranks, but also describe some of the tragic incidents of the way men were treated during the "high-ball" era. Finally, they share with us what this now-vanished way of life in a forest of massive trees meant to them, what they have come to feel about trees and forest land, and why they believe so strongly in conserving big timber as a great economic and spiritual resource.

Logging played a major role in bringing modern industrial civilization to the Northwest; now logging is faced with complex problems created by that civilization. Loggers, in their own lifetimes, saw this transition take place. They experienced it with their hands and backs, minds and hearts. This film lets them tell us about it.

The film is available for rental ($55) and sale ($650) from

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I would hope that this film will honor the memory of those loggers no longer among us.

INTRODUCTION:

The History; The Present

LOGGERS AND THE LAND

The great forest of Douglas fir, cedar, spruce, and hemlock is the primary landscape of western Oregon. Hawks and owls, deer and elk, single-celled animals, bear and man, trout and salmon depend on this forest. Wolves at one time depended on this forest. Here single-celled plants and massive trees are interdependent: trees born before the Renaissance, before white men came to this continent, before the Industrial Revolution, before the split atom. This world is no less majestic than man's, but it is less majestic than it was.

Modern man has tried to tame and domesticate this forest, to change it into his forest. But the forest has its own ways. In the natural cycles, some of it will die from fire and insects and old age, but in its next generation the forest will be stronger for these losses. The forest protects itself by the complex integration of all life forms within its world, and by its genetically natural future. New trees constantly replace old trees in generations that, until a human lifetime ago, had been like a perpetual breeze rippling through the top of the forest, each wave five centuries long. Man cannot make the forest stronger; it is as strong as it needs to be after millions of years of existence, but man can make it more vulnerable.

Man-designed crops have never been grown with much success on cleared forest land; now trees themselves are to be grown and harvested as crops, but the land may resist them also. When forest land becomes tree farms made up of a single genetically new type of tree and with as few other plants and animals as possible, the great risk of a devastating disease epidemic is increased. Without natural protection, the diseases may not be able to be counteracted, even with massive amounts of chemicals. The very characteristics we want and can create in a tree may make trees too weak to survive in the natural world.

Loggers have a special relationship with the forest landscape, different from that of other people. They have seen it through the seasons; they know its heat and dust, poison oak, rain, mud and snow; they know the forest floor and the cry of a six hundred year old tree shattering at the heart, a shiver running to its topmost branches before it falls; they know the sounds of men laughing and men dying in the ancient forest. Logging was a way of life, a true testing of individual men; it also brought to the Northwest modern industrial civilization with huge amounts of capital invested in machinery and technology, ultimately with men replaced by computers. Loggers, in their own lifetimes, saw this transition take place. They experienced it with their hands and backs, in their minds and hearts.

Worthy Opponents

When men set out to leave their mark on land, it changed the land, but the land also changed the men, creating in them a great respect. The old-time logger had to learn to see each new tree as an individual with unique characteristics. When he approached a tree to be felled, he wanted to predict what would happen: Where would it fall? Would it knock down other trees? Might some branches ("widow makers") fall from it? Might it split? Without good answers to these questions he or fellow loggers could be killed or injured. But these answers could never be perfect: there was always, in each new situation, an element of unpredictability just big enough to kill a man. The greater the knowledge of other living things, of a "oneness with nature," the greater the chances of the logger's and his fellow worker's survival.

> "There's never a week goes by that things don't happen to open your eyes and make you realize that there's a lot of power there that you don't have any control

over whatsoever. You've got to outsmart it, out-think it."

After struggling with thousands of trees, seeing fellow workers killed and narrowly escaping death themselves, the older loggers developed respect for these big trees as valued opponents. Originally they wanted and needed to knock them down, but now they have come to feel saddened at the potential loss of these big powerful tests of human skill, strength, and endurance.

This is rarely the present forest manager's experience or concern. Modern industrial man has finally become master of these awesome, primitive forests not by cutting the trees down, but by controlling their age as they grow back so that no trees live longer than a human lifetime. The trees will never attain their full potential in age, size, or girth. The complex of interrelated life systems in the climax forest will be destroyed, probably taking with it a number of plant and animal species that require this type of forest for part of their life cycle. As a result, men will be reminded by the new forest not of his roots in the past, but only of industrial technology.

By cutting young trees when the rate of fibre production slows down (at 30-70 years), the maximum amount of wood fibre in the minimum amount of time can be obtained. These young trees produce a wide-grain, very soft wood, whose fibres will be processed with chemicals and molded into lumber and other products. The practice of cutting trees young will result in the loss of the fine-grain wood products, because the slow ("inefficient") growth rate of adolescent and mature trees produces naturally strong fine-grain wood. And the majestic trees that require 300 years to grow to maturity and that can stay healthy for another 300 years will also be lost. The old-time loggers are more aware than the rest of us that this new industrial technology and economic policy will eliminate the awesome, spiritual, man-dwarfing, man-challenging, cathedral-like quality of the ancient forests. They feel this loss as a serious matter.

But the loggers could not have visualized this loss when they

were cutting the majestic trees. Loggers believed that such trees would grow back in timber land, although not necessarily everywhere. In the past loggers often felt a certain sadness in cutting individual trees, but did not feel a sense of ultimate loss because they did not believe that they would ever come to the end of the original timber, and even if they did, by that time the second-growth trees would be fully mature. Forests, as they knew them, were made up of mature trees 300 and more years old; they could not conceive of forests as wood fibre factories, as tree farms.

The old-time loggers were working for forces they had no control over. They were working to provide a necessary raw material for building a new nation, and they were working in the only occupation available in most of the timber country. They mastered a tough and dangerous challenge. They were proud of their work, of their way of life. But now, after having matched human stength, intelligence, and will with huge trees ten times older than themselves, some have come to feel that there is little honor and challenge in clipping off baby trees 45 years old. The old-time loggers were the unintentional agents of the destruction of the very thing they respected.

> "Loggers have to cut it; that's their way of life. We need to cut timber, but we need to preserve some too."

WHITE PINE TO DOUGLAS FIR

By the mid-nineteenth century, logging had turned just about all the white pine trees of New England into stumps. With the tall timber, the Indians, and the wolves gone, and with so much "daylight let into the swamp," the land was now accessible to farmers and settlers. So the loggers moved on to the pine forests of the North Woods: Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, where there were more and bigger white pine trees than in the New England forests. Here, they thought, was so much timber that surely it could not be cut in a hundred or even a thousand years. They erected steam sawmills

bigger and faster than anything in Maine.

North Woods logging was similar to that in New England. The timber was white pine, the ground was relatively flat, logging was done mostly in winter when the trees were accessible over frozen swamps. The tools were axes and peaveys, and the logs were hauled out on big sleds pulled by horses over icy roads, or were driven down the rivers in the spring. When the drives were in, it was time to celebrate.

By the turn of the century, however, the trees were running out in the Lake States. The loggers began to realize that they were in fact cutting The Big Clearing. They were little concerned that forests were standing in the way of progress, preventing farms and civilized settlements. The loggers felt basically that they had a job to do--"to let daylight in the swamp." And suddenly, for the second time in fifty years, there was "daylight in the swamp." There were hardly any more original white pine forests. The loggers had to move on. Their life was based on hard, dangerous work and play--and always moving to new timber land.

Many came west to the Douglas fir, spruce and cedar forests of the Coast and Cascade Ranges, as well as to the redwood forests of California. By the 'nineties this second migration was well under way. When they arrived in the Pacific Northwest, they found far bigger and taller timber than they had ever seen, and much rougher, steeper ground than they had worked on before. There were no frozen winters, and few of the rivers were deep enough for log driving. Here they could log practically all year around, including the summer.

They had to create a whole new style of logging to match the timber and the land: new ways to knock them down and get them to the mill. The huge size of the Douglas fir required bigger and more efficient saws. The size of the butt, the pitch in it, and the uneven ground forced the fallers to cut high on the stump. To get there they developed the use of springboards. Powerful oxen were trained to haul logs over the ground or along skid roads, replacing the horse-drawn sleds.

To the loggers the Big Woods offered the greater challenge: the rugged ground, the closeness of the trees, the thick underbrush, the

regenerative power of the land, and the huge Douglas fir with a single tree making as much lumber as many, many white pine. The men took the challenge and thought that here finally was a forest of big timber that would never be exhausted.

The loggers from the North Woods were not the first white men to confront this region's timber land. The homesteaders of the mid-nineteenth century found much of the land in the valleys and along the streams overrun with huge trees. To make farms, to make room for their gardens amd livestock, they got rid of the trees by burning them. Without transportation and a market for them, these trees were obstructions that had to be eliminated. However, about the same time, where populations began to congregate along the waterways of the Columbia River and Puget Sound, mills were constructed and cutting of the nearby forests was begun. The demand and price for lumber went up right after the California gold strike, and this gave the timber industry a good start.

LOGGING IN THE NORTHWEST

Early Logging

Monuments to the early days of logging--huge stumps cut three springboards high--are still standing in hills along the lower Columbia River. In the last half of the nineteenth century many of the loggers were also homesteaders, although their homesteads were rarely logged; rather the timber on them was cut down and burned. But once cleared, many homesteads, especially in the foothills of the Coast or Cascade Range, could not produce even a subsistence living, so the homesteaders left their land and families to work in the only industry available: logging. Some homesteaders struggled for nearly a century against the encroaching timber and found a productive crop only in the trees on the land.

Northwest timber land has experienced many changes, and so

has the practice of logging. Loggers were always looking for better ways to do things, and they were constantly faced with changing conditions. Innovations were introduced at various times in different places depending on the kind and size of timber, the terrain, and perhaps most importantly, the personality and experience of the man running the show. Tramp loggers would also carry new practices from camp to camp. It is very difficult to establish specific dates for the various changes in logging.

The first logging in the Northwest was primarily on flats or hills along rivers. Powerful but slow oxen were used to pull the heavy logs over skid roads to a mill or waterway. When the timber got a little lighter some outfits replaced the oxen with faster horses. Logging with animals was an art in itself.

But with the demand for timber expanding, and timber harder to get at, loggers began looking for some mechanized, faster, more efficient procedures for moving the logs from where they were bucked to the mill. Oxen were gone from the woods by about the turn of the century; horses were gone about three to five years later. They were replaced by the beginning of industrialization: the steam donkey, a steam-powered capstan or spool which, by winding up a rope or wire cable attached to bucked-up logs, pulled the logs to a yarding area near the donkey. At first, and for about a decade, the logs were simply dragged along the ground as they had been with oxen and horses: this was the ground lead system.

The original steam donkey design, known as a Dolbeer, had a vertical spool, but in a short time one with a horizontal spool was developed. These were both single spool designs and required some means for getting the line back out into the woods after the log had been brought in. At first men and later horses were used to haul the line back out. A major innovation came in the development of the two-spool system in which the second spool was used to haul the line back out into the woods. Here a line was looped out into the woods through a series of blocks, and each end was attached to a drum. After the main drum was filled with its line from pulling the logs into the landing, the logs would be unhooked and the donkey puncher would start the haulback drum winding-in line,

which pulled the main line off the main drum and back out into the woods for another turn. Yarding was now fully mechanized.

This traditional system of ground lead was dominant during the first decade of the century. One variation on ground lead for use on inclines was the Walking Dudley: an upright steam boiler on a railroad flat car which "walked" up and down grades by means of a cable wrapped around a wheel on the car and anchored to a stump. There is a shot in the film of one hauling a long string of logs down the middle of a railroad track.

In the ground lead system, the logs were loaded on railroad cars by the crosshaul method. A log was pulled onto a platform which slanted down toward the railroad tracks, then a line was attached over and around the log which was pulled up a pair of skids onto the railroad truck.

As the loggers moved away from the benches and hilly ground into rougher country, hang-ups of the ground lead became more frequent and slowed down production. At the same time the demand for lumber was increasing, partly as a result of the need for spruce during World War I to make airplanes. Thus there were demands for greater efficiency and volume in logging. The ground lead system had to be improved or replaced.

The High Lead System

Shortly, in about the middle of the 'teens, a natural modification of the ground lead system swept through the logging camps. This was the high lead system, which remains the basic solution for fast logging in rough country.

In this system the line used to pull the logs into the landing was raised off the ground by sending it through a block hung in a tree near the donkey. This gave a lift to the end of the logs where the cable was attached, so that the logs would be more likely to slide over stumps and other obstructions instead of getting hung up.

The first problem was getting the big block up into the tree, which also had to be topped because the vibrations of the line

going through the block would cause limbs to break off. At first fallers were hired to climb the tree using springboards, limb it, top it, and hang a small block (the pass block) through which a line would be passed to raise the big block to the top of the tree. Since topping trees from springboards was very risky, a rope and climbing spurs rapidly replaced the springboards. High climbing became a specialty within logging.

In the high lead system logs were yarded directly from where they were felled and bucked to the landing. Any trees left standing between the logs and the landing would be a hindrance or would be knocked down as the logs were yarded; therefore, clear cutting was introduced. The clear cut was a result of the high lead system. Selective cutting of just the best trees was possible and desirable with the use of oxen, horse, and ground lead donkeys, because logs were brought out over specially cut roads. But high lead could only work efficiently and quickly if all the trees were cut.

The Highball Era

High lead solved the problems of difficult terrain and high demand, but also brought the characteristics of the highball era: fast logging, powerful machines, high production, and men getting killed. The logger beginning work during the days of ground lead could not have imagined the amount of logs being taken out at the height of heavy logging. From the 'twenties to the late 'thirties--the highball era--the goal was faster logging and more logs.

Logging was and still remains dangerous, mostly because of the unpredictability of falling and bucking. But during the highball era, the machinery and the companies' demand for logs dominated the men, greatly increasing the danger. A lot of men were killed, but at that time there was a surplus of labor. Some companies were more highball than others, driving the men more and requiring them to take bigger risks, but as one man says: "All the camps were pretty tough." Risk-taking became a part of the job and the way of life. The men learned to be faster than the machine and ex-

ceptionally wary. There was a great pride in meeting and surviving the challenge of tough logging bosses, the incredible power of this steam-driven machinery, and the natural resistance of huge trees to be cut and logs to be yarded.

Railroad Logging

The highball era was also the era of railroad logging. The demand for logs was high, the woods were thick with huge trees, and powerful steam-driven locomotives were the most efficient way of bringing the logs out. Both geared locomotives and rod engines were used in logging. Geared locomotives had power transferred directly from the cylinders to the wheels through gears instead of piston rods. Geared locomotives were slow but had exceptional pulling power and were used to haul logs out of the woods on the steep, sharply curved spurs. Rod engines were faster and were used to haul long lines of logs along flat, main line logging tracks. The sounds of rod engines and geared engines were different: geared engines had a faster rhythm.

There were three different designs of geared locomotives. The Shay, which was the most common and is the only geared engine shown in the film, had cylinders standing straight up on the engineer's side of the frame and had the boiler on the other side. The Climax locomotive was designed with its cylinders on both sides of the frame and parallel to it but sloped down toward the cab at an angle of 45°. The Heisler design also had the cylinders on both sides of the frame but they slanted up and out at 45°, forming a "V" at a right angle to the engine.

Both flat cars and disconnected trucks (sets of wheels with loading stakes) were used to haul logs. With disconnected trucks, the weight of the load was sufficient to keep the trucks together and different log sizes could be mixed on a single train. Tongs attached to a loading boom and controlled by a donkey were used to load the logs.

Logging Camps

Highball outfits, railroad logging, tramp loggers, and logging camps were all part of the same era in the Northwest. Cooking was a vital institution in these camps. It was said that bad cooking had sent many a man down the road in search of the perfect camp. Of course there were other reasons why men went down the road: they wanted to see new country, or learn new ways, and sometimes a company fired a man because it wanted to sell his job to a new man. This "slave market" pracice was finally stopped when the loggers organized, but the expectation that loggers would want to move from camp to camp continued. Regardless of how good it was, no camp could hold or attract men unless there was an opportunity to go to town once in a while. Then, as railroad logging declined, the traditions of logging camp life, going back to the forests of Maine, came to an abrupt halt. With the advent of truck logging and roads into the woods, loggers could live at home and drive to the logging site each day.

River Drives

Driving logs down river to a mill was one of the traditions of the white pine forests of Maine and the North Woods that was originally brought out to the Northwest. Since the first trees logged were generally on the flats along rivers and streams, these were the best and only means for transporting logs to mills. But there was a big difference: on Northwest rivers generally there was more white water to get the logs through.

On the McKenzie and upper Willamette Rivers, the peak in river driving occurred from 1890 to 1910. One active run was down Fall Creek through its confluence with the Willamette and down to Eugene. Here drives were made from 1900 to 1907. The narrator of this section of the film followed with the cooking crew while his father worked on the drives. The movie film of a

log drive at the end of this section is from an unknown location in Oregon in the 'teens. It may be from the east side of the Cascades, since the drive included some Ponderosa pine among the Douglas fir.

River driving in Oregon declined very quickly after 1910. Farmers along the river opposed the trampling of fences and crops by the crews and horses. And splash dams, built on some rivers to flood them and carry logs downstream when the water was low, were accused of tearing away river bank soil and hindering fish spawning. But the fundamental reason for the decline of river drives was that the trees accessible to log-driving streams had been cut. As the loggers went higher into the hills for their trees and the demand for logs increased, railroads became the most feasible means of getting logs to the mill.

ON THE FILM AND FILMMAKING

Many people are naturally wary of an outsider's attempt to explain their way of life to a general public, and loggers are no exception. So it was with no little amount of nervousness that I went back into the communities and homes of these men to show the finished film to them, their families, and neighbors before it was released to the public. Perhaps some were a little nervous too. But after the film was over, the men were up and talking, comparing their experiences to those in the film. Some recognized a fellow worker from the 'twenties, or exclaimed they worked on that old 4-spot Shay. Many old-time loggers said that before seeing the film they thought they would die without hearing the sound of a steam donkey again. One of the toughest men had a certain dampness in his eyes when it was over. It's meant to be really <u>their</u> film.

The film is a portrait, as accurate as I could make it, of a group of men and a way of life that continues to affect us all. These men provide important insights for the future because they saw the past and because their lives and jobs spanned the transi-

tion from the frontier-agrarian society to the present-day technological high-consumption economy. Logging was the primary factor in bringing about that transition for the Pacific Northwest, and loggers were the men who did the actual work, often giving their health and sometimes their lives.

A Note on Procedure and Preservation

Oral history--the basic approach used in making this film--is a procedure for learning about historical events by interviewing the actual participants in those events. The techniques of oral history have been developed by historians in fields where there is little written history. To find out the how, when, and who of events one simply has to go to the people who remember them.

The old-time loggers were not difficult to find. In the process of research, using the resources of local historical societies and museums as well as contacts with long-time residents, I soon learned the names of people who were articulate and experienced in certain subjects. "Who around here could tell me from his personal experience about - - - - - - -?" In a particular community often the same names would be mentioned a number of times. These people were interviewed and were also the sources for other names.

I always talk with someone for awhile--sometimes an hour, sometimes a day--about the subject before asking permission to begin tape recording. Tape recorders seem to intimidate the inexperienced interviewer rather than the person being interviewed. Generally people enjoy being interviewed with a tape recorder unless the interviewer appears nervous about it. I set the microphone directly in front of the person and place myself behind it, so in talking to me the person talks into the mike. Where possible, the recorder should be placed out of the person's view, so the reels are not seen turning. Cassette recorders with the mike built into the machine are usually rather unobtrusive and can be placed directly in front of the person.

It is important not to let any preoccupation with the mechanical instrument obstruct the human contact. The situation is not a performance, but a conversation. For example, I rarely set recording levels by using tests of the person's voice; by looking at the room, listening to the voice, and standardizing the placement of the microphone one can usually judge the proper settings. This eliminates some initial self-consciousness of both the interviewee and the interviewer. I also do not stop the conversation while changing reels; one can always go back if something is missed, although of course it will be expressed a little differently.

I hope that this brief description of my procedures will encourage those who have a desire to record the reminiscences of acquaintances, neighbors, or relatives, but who feel somewhat unsure about doing it. As a little experience will prove, it's easy and a pleasure. And it's important, because many interesting and significant facts about human history--memories, voices, and photographs--are being lost daily.

Never before within the span of a single generation have there been such extensive changes in the ways we live. If we are to survive these changes and understand their implications, it might be helpful to learn how they came about and what they felt like from the point of view of people who actually experienced the transition.

Never before has there been the technology available to record the human voice efficiently and cheaply. The "presence" and life of the human voice gives a reality to images, perceptions, and events that we have not ourselves experienced. This reality is a bridge to the past and can be one to the future.

In the late nineteenth century, certain economically motivated predictions about the future became commonly accepted; they gave men reasons to disregard natural processes and manipulate the world for profit. Now there is the growing realization that some of these past predictions were myths based on sheer hope, which has been shattered against the realities that emerged. But new predictions, based on the assumed power of technology to save us from the mis-

takes created by the earlier assumptions that did not materialize, have replaced these myths.

Yet some things have not changed: as the forests are disappearing, a lot of private wealth is still being made, and men are still being killed and injured. The new myths, created to justify current practices of business as usual, may disappoint us deeply; moreover, there may be no chance in the present or future to correct the myths and prevent the irreparable damage they cause. But the shared experiences, clear observations, and deeply held values about work and land--as expressed by the loggers, for example--may help us envision and create a future which will allow the survival of desirable human physical and emotional qualities in a natural environment. The question now may well be, can this be attained before human consumption and reproduction go irrevocably beyond the life-supporting natural resources?

The Historical Film and Sound

Much of the historical logging film was shot by Jesse Sill, the first movie photographer in Oregon. During the second decade of this century he went into the dust and brush with his wood box, one lens, hand-crank 35mm movie camera and nitrate film. Mr. Sill has been making films since then. Now in his nineties, he has recently completed a new film. And he can still hand-crank that original camera at the right speed.

Lewis Clark Cook, a filmmaker and Mr. Sill's life-long friend, student, and collaborator, reduced these original 35mm nitrate films to 16mm safety film. During the 1930's he courageously protected the nitrate originals from destruction. Without the foresight and help of Mr. Cook, this film would not have been possible.

Don Hunter, a creator of audio-visual presentations, hauled the early "portable" tape recording equipment into the woods to preserve the sounds--more ephemeral than the actual steel machines--of the last steam engines. It would have been wonderful if this equipment

had been available during the days of ox-team logging, but unfortunately the commands and poetry of the bull puncher are gone forever.

To record the images and sounds of old-time logging these men went into the woods and shared some of the life of the logger; there is a connection between loggers and filmmakers: they must both sometimes go where other, perhaps wiser, men would just as soon step back.

A Note on Filmmaking

One of my greatest pleasures with this film has come from going back and showing the film in the homes and communities of the men who are in it. Although this is not commonly done, there is a strong documentary tradition of treating film as only a small part of the larger process of communication between human beings. A film does not--cannot--do all the communicating possible about a subject; rather, it is a tool for direct human contact, for discussing and sharing ideas and feelings.

It is in this tradition that the filmmaker serves as a "conduit" or a "mediator" for the thoughts and feelings of the subjects. His or her job is to present their thoughts in as clear and true a manner as possible, to design the film for the communication of human feeling. The people are participants in the process of creating the film; they are not just the subjects. This is humanistic filmmaking. Subjects are not chosen and handled in the film for what they might represent for an average entertainment-seeking audience.

In this humanistic tradition, real people are recorded in their own spaces. The emphasis is on allowing them to express something rather elusive and vulnerable: human feelings that are distillations of their life experiences. A fundamental subject of this film is how people who have lived long lives of physical labor use their own words, not the words of professional philosophers or publicists, to articulate meanings abstracted out of their experiences. This is

a tradition of filmmaking begun most dramatically by Robert Flaherty and continued today by, among others, the Challenge for Change program of the National Film Board of Canada.

A Final Point

I would hope that the history of our civilization will be preserved in the voices and words of the people who experienced it, who confronted its forces and who, on a personal day-to-day basis, tried to come to terms with it. These are not the usual documents for creating the abstractions of typical history texts which are preoccupied with power and with the men and forces that are thought to control others. We are realizing that traditional historical documents often give considerably less than the truth; moreover, they rarely give a sense of the fabric of human life in a period. The beliefs and feelings of people who experienced the forces of a civilization are, I believe, as important to an understanding of that civilization as are the actions of those who are said to control the events. Humanistic study, then, must include the preservation and study of the genuine, real-life responses of people, from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, who, in the richness of their direct and open expression, emerge as perceptive and sensitive human beings, as perhaps touchstones for a culture.

NATURAL TIMBER COUNTRY

The Text

NATURAL TIMBER COUNTRY

The Text

Stumps spring-boarded three notches high

Sound of power saw, wedging with steel wedges, call. . .

* * *

Homesteaders; clearing land

Timber all around you, you know; you couldn't go no place without this timber. And they just figured--well, the old timers just cut it and burn it up; get rid of it, you know. They just thought that never, never would ever see the day that it'd be cut.

* * *

Cleared land in timber country now growing Christmas trees

I was born here, on this place--1888.
Lots of big trees; we'd burn 'em down.
They'd slash a place down and burn it off, then burn the logs. You couldn't give it away at that time.

Well, I like timber; I like to grow timber. I could tell some of 'em I spent the most of my workin' life cutting trees, then when I retired I went to growin' 'em. And I get a bigger kick out of growing.

I want my trees to be appreciated.

* * *

One log loads; big cedar, spruce and fir trees

The big stuff, really the big, big stuff has been cut out. The old timers never dreamed they'd ever, ever see the end of 'em. It'd go on and on they thought.

* * *

Christmas tree farm; forest beyond

It's natural tree country. Well, because if you don't keep cultivating a piece of this country it goes back to forest, natural.

* * *

Paintings of North Woods white pine country: changes

At that time, I think everybody, they just thought timber was inexhaustible, there was no end to it. They didn't think that we needed to conserve any of it. And it's a tragic thing because, Wisconsin, I don't think there's even a representative stand of white pine left there. And I think people now are coming to realize--too late probably--that we need that.

* * *

Titles

Forest in fog

Yes, lots of changes: you've seen the change from steam to diesel; saw the high climber being displaced by steel towers; railroads are gone, the trucks have come in;

Loggers; old logging camp

loggers wore soft hats and tin coats and tin pants in those days, now it's the other way around: they wear tin hats and softer other clothes; the size of the timber is dropped tremendously. The atmosphere of the camp is gone. It used to be that in a camp you would hear steam, you

An abandoned camp

would hear a shop, you would hear a locomotive whistle, the trains switching, all of these things are gone. One of the things that you miss most of all in the woods is the voice command of the head rigger, or the second rigger, or the hook tender. . .

Loggers reminiscing

Course now, today we have the power saw and they make plenty of noise, but falling timber was comparatively quiet. You'd just hear that swish, swish, swish of the saw and it wasn't even that loud, and then once in awhile you'd hear the ring of the wedges as they, they'd wedge their tree, and today I don't hear the sound of, or the cry of timber. But I can remember hearing the timber fallers way up on a ridge and they would holler: "Timber,

down the hill!" And that meant for the buckers down below, maybe hundreds of feet below, to look out because this big tree--tons, and tons, and tons--a lot of times would get away from 'em and go like a runaway express train down the hill. And it was a beautiful sound, the call of "Timber!" which was not just for the fun of it, but was very necessary to protect the lives of the men.

Tree sliding down hill

* * *

Falling

Riding out on mulligan

Cutting notches, setting springboards and chopping undercut in a spruce

The only work there was, was you either work in the woods or not work. You go out in the . . . kinda in the spring, you know, when they fallin' the timber and the boughs begin to dry up and the odor from the. . . . Oh, they sure got a sweet smell, and you get around them old pitchy stumps and the pitch smells good. It really gets in your blood. And being out in the, in among the timber is a big factor, too.

* * *

Cutting undercut in a fir

If you're falling by hand, pretty near always a man will 'board, he won't work on the ground because you've got something solid under your feet and you're on a level, where if you work on the ground, you're not on a level.

I've been on trees where I was 40 feet off the ground, not necessarily on a tree, but I've been out over a cliff that was say 40, 50 feet off the ground to cut a tree.

* * *

Lying down in undercut

In those days they didn't, they didn't monkey with anything that, any big tree or any of 'em, that had a conk on it; why, uh, they left it, they didn't want it at all.
--You wouldn't even fall it?
No, wouldn't even fall it . . . Yeah, I know one set of fallers that, uh, they'd go along where a tree was hard to get at, you know, maybe on a little rock bluff or something, and they all had to springboard 'em, you know,

put springboards up, and, uh, they got, they'd just go get a conk off an old tree and they'd carried some nails, they'd nail a conk on it, see, so when the bull buck come around, why: "Got a conk on it there."

Sighting the tree

They pulled that right along--nail a conk on a tree to keep from cutting it.

* * *

Starting the back cut; putting oil on the saw

--You also talk about the tree as "He."

Uh huh, he, uh, he's one of us. He's tree; I mean it's you, the next fellow, and the tree. There's three people, I guess you might say--not so in a sense, but--because there's certain things about it: he's tall. And he's . . . of course he's either sound or it's probably unsound and you're going to try to save him. And of course all these things you know you try to work out, so you wonder what's going to happen, what is it going to do when you fall it and all of that. But I always do, a tree is something, each tree is different and since you have to try to save it more and try to save the timber that is down too, then you have to go into it a little further and find out exactly what, just what can you do. You want to save all that's possible of that tree. We do anything possible that might help us save the particular tree. Now that's where the feeling for trees, or for timber, today that we have that wasn't around 25-30, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, naybe even 10-12 years ago.

Wedging with steel wedges

* * *

Trees falling

There's never a week goes by that things don't happen to open your eyes and make you realize that there's a lot of power there that you don't have any control over whatsoever. You've got to outsmart it, out-think it.

* * *

But I told her that I'd seen thousands of them felled and

I always felt the same way about it, too. I hated to see a tree felled, but I understood that it had to be done, and a certain satisfaction in seeing, a thrill or excitement in seeing a tree fall but there was always also a certain sadness, and you never really get over it. I don't anyway.

* * *

Sound of tree falling

The faller

* * *

Bucking

And several years ago, in the blowdown, why, we had a grouse nest right in the middle of the unit that we was cutting. And it's quite a trick, you know, to keep everything off it; and you know a grouse will stay right there--till the very last minute--it'll fly off. It'll come back, if you leave it alone, I mean, don't handle the eggs or anything. And we've cut a few settings where we've left the nest and the grouse there undisturbed and, uh . . .

Measuring felled tree

--Cut everything around it.

We'll fall everything away from it, what few we have to fall we'll fall away from it. When in this blowdown, why we bucked it, we was real careful and we left it, we left it intact.

* * *

Things are so unpredictable, that's all there is to it. There's a hundred thousand different situations and there's a hundred thousand different outcomes for each one and it's just impossible to figure out what is going to happen in each one. You become wary, you become wise, and you become cagey, and, uh, a lot of men that have been have ended up in the cemetery, of course, because of just these unknown factors in the situation that finally catch up with them.

* * *

Sawing trees into logs by hand and by chainsaw

But I can remember when I was working, to me, there were few--I'd worked a few places but I was just starting out. But when I worked in a place like Valsetz, or Black Rock, or when I went to work to Joe Florey's, it meant something because those were the camps that were pretty tough and they wanted hard work, they got out a lot of logs. And though maybe it was the hard way and a lot of mistakes were made in those days and they hurt a lot of men, but that was logging in those days. And it meant something to loggers, you know.

--Well, those were highball camps.

Some of them were, they generally all were, tended to be. Some were more so, maybe in an unsafe manner, maybe in the way they disregarded men, but loggers seemed to have accepted a certain amount of that; it seemed to have been a way of life in those days. That was the whole story: it wasn't that it was unsafe as such, which it was, but more so because it was a way of life. I think there was some appeal in that fact itself. They didn't seem to be too worried about it; I think they had a confidence in themselves or they built up a confidence in yourself for the same reason that if you didn't, why, you wouldn't, of course, last very long.

Bucked-up trees

* * *

Bull Team Logging

He could take them any place you could take a team. And he'd go right into a tree that was bucked up, ya know, sawed up in logs, by gosh, and he'd bring them bulls, he'd cut a road, make a road into the tree. And he'd take them bulls in there and he'd stand right in there with his goad stick and make them come around him, ya know, by golly, when the last bull--yoke--made the turn he stopped them and they was hooked on then. But he'd stand right in there, they'd be bulls coming this way and bulls going that way around him, he'd stand right in there.

Logs on skid road

Bull puncher with goad stick

And ya know where to goad a bull to make him mind, an animal, a cow-brute? It's high up behind the shoulder. By god, they can't take that, and that learns them quick, they don't want it the second time. You know, a cow-brute knows a damn site more than they get credit for.

* * *

Logger as a young man

With his father

And next job I got was loggin' behind the bull team. And that was about 18-and-98. A bull team was all the power we had there. And my father was fallin' timber and I was greasin' skids.

Logger today

Bull puncher, bulls, skid greaser

The only team in the outfit is probably the leader, they're the ones that understood all the signals. They'd turn, the rest of them would have to turn and go with them. They could take a bull right off the ranch that'd never been hooked up, and hook him up and go loggin' with him--just a few days, just trainin'.

* * *

Skid greaser

A bull puncher's supposed to be a man that every other word's a swear word, ya know (laughs). They hired, while I was working there that summer, they hired a bull puncher, and he was a preacher. By gosh, he didn't last long. They claimed it was because he wouldn't swear.

Ya grease with a swab on a stick, ya know, and, according to the way your load was a-pullin', ya greased every skid if ya had a heavy load, and if ya had a light load ya greased maybe every second skid or third skid. And ya greased between the last yoke of bulls and the log. A new bull, he was always next to the log and ya had to look out for him because he'd kick the shit out of ya.

They had a fellow name of Beasley driving bulls and he unyoked 'em at noon and, by god, laid down and went to sleep and fed the bulls and, by god, it was four or five

days before they found all those bulls. (laughs)

Old-growth fir

Yah, most of them old fellows that knows anything about bulls are gone, the biggest part of them.

Paintings: oxen to horses

The horses took the place of the bulls and then the steam took the place of the horses. A good horse team will outpull a good bull team; that is, just two and two. The

Horse teams

horses didn't last very long, I think they're too high tempered for the woods.

* * *

Ground Lead

And, uh, they didn't have the means of logging steep ground then. If a horse couldn't go there, why, they didn't log it.

Vertical spool (Dolbeer) steam donkey

* * *

But everything was logged on the ground, there's no high

Horizontal spool donkey with horses used for haul-back

leads, ya drag 'em on the ground. And we used to use jack screws up the top the high hills, to shoot them down hills so they could reach them with the spool.

* * *

You take a log that gets stuck out here and you're ground

Rigging crew; sniped logs

logging and it hangs up out here, you've got to stop and somebody's got to go out there, maybe two or three hundred feet, and change that choker around to kick that log out from behind that stump.

* * *

Riding the logs

I was chasing, yeah. We'd ride the logs most of the way down after they got started; sometimes we run along side and we'd jump on the logs and ride over the smooth places. And we'd hook them logs together, with dogs, ya know. And that old line'd start to tighten and the logs stay still for awhile and all at once they'd take a jump; sometimes they'd all come apart, then we'd have to pull them together and dog 'em together again.

* * *

Two spool donkey; logs yarded to loading platform

Chaser riding "boat" back out to woods

Walking Dudley

When the first donkeys come out, why, they ground logged with them and that's what they run into was a problem of hang-ups on the ground. And then someone got the idea that if they could raise the logs up, why, they could get away from that and that's where the spar pole come into being was with the idea of getting a lift on the end of the log to raise them over objects.

* * *

Loading platform and crosshauling

They'd just got into the spar trees, they had stump rigs just before that, but I didn't even see that, that was a little before my time.

--What's a stump rig?

Stump rig; falling high on the stump

Well, they just springboard up so high, as high as they thought they dared to and hang their riggin' up in that and they just kept a-gettin' higher.

* * *

High Climbing

Oh, this is about 1915. I rigged the first high lead tree that Hammond's had. It was over a hundred feet high. The

Climber putting on spurs and rope

climber ahead of me, he went up on springboards about a hundred and eighty feet and topped this tree and hung the pass block. So they brought a pair of spurs out--that's the first climbing outfit I ever seen--and I put 'em on. And the only way I could get up the tree was to put the rope around, kinda work the rope around, and get my feet in them springboard holes and then I could throw the rope up. And I rigged the tree myself.

* * *

Limbing

Your rope has a steel core in it that will withstand a glancing blow of the axe, but if you hit it straight, why, that steel core doesn't help much if you hit it a straight blow. And your rope is right up there where you're choppin' all the time, when you're limbing the

tree especially. That's usually where your danger is of cutting it off, is while you're limbing the tree. I think that was where the most of them happened, was in limbing the tree, going up, they would chop their rope off.

* * *

Oh, I've cut two strands out of a four strand rope plumb off, but anytime you cut two strands out of a four-strand rope, you've got the others cut pretty good. If your tree lent quite a little bit, why, it's apt to split on you. If it split on you, why, just too bad, it'd break your rope or kill you right there.

Chopping the undercut

* * *

Sawing the backcut

And I got pretty tired going up and it was so big at the butt I couldn't get my rope completely tied so I just had to hang on to one end of it until I got up to where it tapered enough that I could tie the rope. And when I got to the top I kept noticing I was getting slack, but I got tired because I'd been in the hospital--I wasn't too well recuperated--so I decided to rest and I kind of leaned back and I looked and here the rope had come untied and I just had the end of it between my two fingers, holding on to it up there.

Top going out

It gives you kind of a thrill when that top goes out and the old trunk starts swayin' back and forth . . . I've always kind of enjoyed it.

--When the top finally goes, what do you have to do? Well, the first thing you have to do is drop your saw or axe, whatever you have in your hand which you've got tied to your belt and then you swing around directly behind it and get your spurs dug in well and brace yourself to, so you can ride with the tree. If you're on the side of it and it's a limber tree it would give you such a

shake that you might kick your spurs loose and you'd just be hanging in your rope and it'd beat your face to a pulp up there.

Oh, a good tall limber tree--I'd probably--some of them probably swing twenty feet, the sway of it up there.

* * *

If I'da thought, I could have showed you a picture of a guy standin' up on top of it; I've stood up on 'em. The standin' up there don't bother ya at all, it's when you go to get down--the movin', bendin' to get down, that's the main thing. Course you're nuts to do it.

Climber standing on top of tree

No, I've stood up on, oh, I don't know, four or five. But then that ain't even your work or nothing, that's just 'cause you're crazy to do it--just taking your life into your own hands doin' it.

High climber coming down

I've seen where a fellow was killed there by a tree a-splittin' on him. I've had 'em to crack, down, for a foot or two or three foot. But course when you do that--you're on spurs at that time, see--you get scared you can come down one of them pretty fast. And the more experience you had you got so you'd come down a tree in just, oh, six, eight, ten feet at a jump--just kickin' the rope out and comin' down and just kinda lettin' your spurs dig in. It's, well, it's quite a practice, see?

* * *

He went up to top a tree, he said, and, oh, he was up there about one hundred and fifty feet. And he said that it was a steep, steep canyon where he was cutting the top off. He said: "As the top broke over it kicked back, and," he said, "I unbuckled my belt and stepped right on the ground."

* * *

High Lead

Men getting on mulligan and riding out to woods

Several times I've taken a man's place where they've just been killed on that job, and step right in and do his job. It don't make you feel too goddamn healthy or secure.

* * *

Moving donkeys

I'll tell you, movin' them donkeys in that rough country was something. I've run out of water on a move like that and you'd have to stop and put the fire out because there wasn't enough water in the boiler to be safe. I've had 'em if you let, slack the line up, they'd just fall on over.

You pick out the best road with the least amount of stumps you could, and you'd hook your line on one side of the sled and that would make your donkey go one way and you hook on the other side and it'd make it go the other way. And that's the way you moved around the stumps. I've moved 'em about one hundred feet in a day and maybe not even that far some days.

* * *

Rigging crew setting chokers

They used to say: "Run in to save your job and run out to save your ass." Goddamn right, boy, you want to be movin', you didn't want to stumble (laughs); stop, look back. . . You know, when they used them old steam donkeys you wanted to run, too.

* * *

Yarding

Whenever they heard that bell click, they'd blow the whistle, and it was up to you to move, you had to already know which way you was going to get out of the way. Sometimes you didn't have much time because years ago they figured that throttle ought to come wide open just awful quick after they give 'em a highball to go ahead.

* * *

I've heard of a man getting killed in the morning in the

Donkey, spar tree, landing, clear cut

woods and they'd put him behind a stump until that evening to go into camp. Now that's what they call a highball camp. They wouldn't--a dead man didn't mean any more than that to them. They would hold him till evening to get their work in and then take him in.

* * *

Steam donkey

Several years back, why, they didn't think anything about killing a choker setter or something, you know, they'd go right on logging, they never stopped. The unions come in: that's what straightened that situation out, you see.

* * *

Yarding

And when you did get a big old growth in and fought him in and so on, it seemed like, almost like physical combat. That log did not want to move and he would hang up, slow down, roll around, behind a stump, behind a tree or into a, dig into a hill or something to try and resist all your efforts to get him in. And it was up to the logger to use every bit of force and cunning and however he could get it--through his ability, through prayer, through swearing, through, uh, they used to say you could talk 'em in. And if sometime a log would go into the landing that it looked like he was guided by a hand and they would say the log had an eye in the end of it--that he was watching where he was going.

Present day landing crew working in the snow

* * *

Oh, during the depression I was working for a superintendent, they called him "Vinegar Face." Oh, he says to this hooker that we've got to have a few more logs. "Well, how many do you want, Charlie?" "Twice as many as you're getting and that won't be half enough."

* * *

But what caused a lot of that was they contracted to the riggin' crew: after they got so many thousand in per day, or week or month, well, then they got a bonus and 'course the boys started jumpin' right at her, flying right at it then and consequently, why, they is lots of 'em got hurt over it. And then of course the hooketenders, they was on a bonus a lot of the time, and the side rods.

* * *

Steam yarding, clearcut

The cleaner the ground is cut the better your high lead works. Because you hit a tree back there, your log goes on one side and your line on the other, why, you've got a natural hang-up. You have a high lead, see, and your line pulls high and you don't hang up behind them stumps and stuff, near so bad. You can get more logs with a high lead than you can with a ground lead, and it's just a faster way of gettin' logs in.

Releasing choker

* * *

Men riding tongs

We put in the most logs in an eight hour day. As I remember, it was a million six-hundred ninety-thousand feet. They claimed at the time that it was a world record and it would never be beaten on account of not having the timber to do it . . . again.

* * *

Shay with disconnected trucks

Loading donkey

Disconnected trucks loaded

Rod engines

Shay with mulligan

Sounds of Shays, rod engines, steam loading donkey

* * *

Train coming into camp, loggers jumping out of boxcars

When the train would hit there with its open mulligan or boxcar-like device which was open, no sides or end on it, why, before this had come to a full stop the loggers would begin jumping off and their caulk boots rumbled this plank--a huge plank platform area--just like thunder as they, as they rolled off the--jumped off of the train.

* * *

Camps and Jobs

Logging camp town

Old camp with cook

Other cooks and cookhouses

Bunkhouses

"French Jenny"

Women and loggers in the woods

At a long period of time where the old tramp logger used to, well, he liked to see the other side of the hill once in awhile and learn new games, you know, different ways. That's their life: just to keep moving; although they're just out hunting for a good cookhouse. And your companies at one time would just as soon you did, because when a new man come in, why, they'd get a lot more work out of him. He was faster, quicker, energetic; he was always in a hurry. After he was there awhile, maybe he'd slow down. Well, after he started slowing down then they didn't--they'd just as soon he'd move on 'cause they'd get a new man, is the same way. You could go to town, maybe for two weeks and come right back and go back to work there, they figured you needed a rest maybe. In a couple of weeks you'd come back and you was all new again and you'd just bounce, and you's hurrying.

--Highball!

Highball! They just didn't want them staying around, what they call homeguarding.

* * *

Group portraits at logging sites and in old camps; in front of bunk houses

And every other morning or so we'd come out and Flora'd be out there by the mulligan, where they're going to ride out--the crummy--and he'd say: "You want to go to town today?" We'd say: "No!" "Well," he'd say, "You're going

and I'll get you a partner." (laughter) So he give him a ticket, and then he'd go in and get his time. And he'd see another guy comin' there: "Would you like to go on the other side today?" "Which side is that?" "Burnside." (laughter) So! There'd be a crew comin' in, a crew working, and a crew goin' out. They'd made just as much through the employment offices as logging.

Young and old loggers

Not employment offices: the slave market.

But he would pay the slave market what--a dollar, two?

A dollar, two, depends on what the job in the woods pays, and he collected accordingly up there. If it was a little higher priced job, he might have to pay two and a half; if it wasn't quite so high priced he might get by for a dollar. But you had to pretty near always go through that way.

* * *

Interior, Erickson's saloon
Another saloon

When you went to town, you went down to Erickson's saloon, and they took care of you there. Wasn't long till you were in the kitchen washing dishes for your, something to eat. Oh boy! (laughs)

* * *

Donkey crew, laughing

So I asked him for a job. He says: "Old Jimmy Joyce will kill me he finds out I put another man on, but," he said, "Goddamn it, bull buck today and tramp tomorrow; we got to all stick together."

* * *

Contemporary loggers, eating lunch in crummy and getting ready to go back to work in the snow

The Wobblies--the IWW's--they created the changes, about during the war and right after the war.

* * *

You know, even the most ignorant timber beast realizes that all he has is his labor to sell.

* * *

I've been what they call a boomer, ya see. Well, you go anyplace, you pack your bed, clothes, took everything with you you're going to need. Only your eats, they fed ya and give ya kind of a place to sleep.

* * *

In the early days, in the bunkhouses, they had sometimes 15, 20, 25 men in bunkhouses--double deckers. One stove! And ya had a big line around that bunkhouse and they'd hang that old underwear up on that line and it'd start steaming.

* * *

Two moonlight rides every day and a picnic lunch, he says, what else would you want?

* * *

River Drive

Pile of logs

River drive crews with peaveys

They'd go out in the spring and work in the, in the loggin' woods till fall when it was time to make the drive--when they got their amount of timber out--and then they ceased loggin' and they all took out on the drive. So they were the same men that run the river that cut the timber and hauled it in. There was no special guys for that, they just all was river drivers or loggers; it didn't make any difference.

Crews with horses

Crew breaking log jam with peaveys

They'd start out, maybe they'd have, oh, three, four, two-horse teams, mostly four two-horse teams to pull the logs off the bars with, and then they had a crew of about seven, eight men with peaveys rollin' 'em off the bars and rocks. And, oh, they'd make three or four miles a day, three miles sometimes, sometimes they wouldn't make over a mile.

A team of horses'd pull 'em off these bars where they'd, ya know, they'd jam, they keep shoving one another, ya

Logs down river

Crews using horses to break log jam

know, and they get out and some of 'em get clear on dry ground, gravel, ya know. And they, they drive the dogs in 'em and this tripper, he would--dogger and tripper--he'd drive the dogs in and ride the log out with his peavey. And he'd ride it out, till it floated, and then he'd hit those dogs and knock 'em out and they'd just swing the horses right back around, the team around, and, uh, the log'd take off down the river, and they go back and get another.

Log jam at Jacoby Rocks

Crew taking break

Crew working with peaveys breaking logs loose

Jam breaks

One bad rock they always dreaded was the Jacoby Rocks down here at Jasper, ya know, this side of Jasper, and they always had a big jam there and they figured on two or three days of breakin' that. There's one place the river drivers always dreaded because they just knew the whole river was jammed with logs, and, uh, they're hard to break out there too. Ya take a jam up like that with the swift water--see, that's pretty swift there--and it's hard to get 'em loose 'cause so much pressure on 'em. And you got to break the down river log loose first, see. And they'd hook in the end of one and pull it around to break the jam, the key log, they'd figure out the best one to pull, they'd hook into it, and break 'er, ya know, and maybe the, maybe they'd be a whole bunch of 'em go down.

Man riding log down rapids with peavey

Film: floating through rapids

There's about three top hands, ya know, on the log drive that could ride logs and thay was all trippers and tripped the dogs and they'd ride the logs. The last log they'd pull off a bar, whoever tripped it, he'd ride it down the river. If it just went right through it was fine, but if it hit a rock, you know, and swung around, why, most generally, they'd duck 'em. But they had their peavey with 'em too, to swim out with. Once in awhile they'd lose a peavey, they couldn't make 'er. (laughs)

Yeah, real catty, them guys were.

* * *

Trees, Forests The Land

The loggers, they tend to, uh, they tend to, I think, have a feeling that the woods are theirs.

* * *

Logger

Well, all, 'bout all one could see then was timber: big timber, medium timber, and small timber.

Old growth forest

On a Sunday sometimes we'd take a gun and go out in the woods; it'd be quiet, you know. And you'd go out, well, you'd go quite a long ways; you'd see nothing but these beautiful big trees. You could set down on a log and you could hear them talking to you, almost whispering up there, you know, and telling you just what was going on, but you couldn't understand it. You'd never realize that someday they'd be extinct, you know, and never to come back again, in that proportion, you know. It was almost, uh, it was really a recreation just to go out there and sit down and look around to see all those beautiful trees all over and that.

Moss covered log

Fir seedling

* * *

Fog and ferns

Over the years, you know, I've gone to work and there was a nice aroma about the woods, something there that felt good. Maybe a week later I wish'd I'd never seen the woods, you know, maybe it was raining too hard or something like that, but then there's those mornings that there's a beautiful feeling about it. I think that's something that attracts all of them, that brings them back or keeps them there.

Sunlight through fog

Old growth forest, old trees, moss, ferns

To me it's a little depressing because here these old fellows have been around for so long and so much of it has been wasted because, oh, the top blew over, or they fell over, or they completely rotted out; nobody got any use out of it. Here they lived, well, 500 of their 700 years, nobody probably got any use out of it, maybe even not even seeing it, you know. But I like to see some of it because it does--I mean it shows the durability of trees, how long they can last, and, uh, it's probably nice to have some of it still standing, I think, just so people like to see that.

* * *

Tall trees in fog

Present-day clear cut

Bleached snags

Tops of trees in fog

Well, I really think that, uh, there's not going to be any forests of the future. Forests to me mean splendid old trees, with animals in it, with a variety of trees, snags, windfalls: everything that it took to create over the hundreds of years that the live trees stood. I feel quite certain that the forest of the future that the big companies talk about now are going to be nothing more than they have begun to call them: tree farm. And you won't be able to walk in them because a tree that is 35 years of age, he's still bushy, he's still got a lot of little pin limbs. There'll be no majesty; there'll be no cathedral-like feeling. Probably they'll harvest the trees at 25 to 35 years of age, that they'll be after fibre that you hear them talk about.

Forest covered mountain, edge of forest, clear cut

I know that little trees are beautiful and you see them growing in beautiful spots and so on, but certainly a dense growth of second growth trees that you'd walk into, as far as I'm concerned, there's nothing there, it's not mature. It, it isn't old enough yet to bring a feeling of man.

* * *

Young pine in sun, pan down fir in snow

American Bald Eagle near nest in a fir tree

Dark-eyed junco in fir tree

Golden-crowned kinglet hunting insects on a fir cone

Trees in snow

Sun in pine

I think your rapid yield growth is going to be a good thing, but I think that we still have to leave representative stands of the old growth for several reasons: one for our future generations and also for wildlife. I don't know what, just what will happen with our, that type of wildlife unless there's some representative stands left so that they do have a place.

It's one of the facts of life is the way your trees grow, and we have to think that far ahead. Mistakes we make now, we could be paying for 'em two hundred years later. We'll always need some of your fine-grained old growth for certain things, for a long rotation--three or four hundred years old, possibly. And then when they've reached their climax

stage and were logged, well then there should be others coming up so you'd have a continuous representative stand in your old growth.

Sun shining on forest floor

I guess timber's been my life . . . It's all I've ever done to speak of.

* * *

Logger walking on his own land that he logged years ago

I think that most loggers, I think that they get to feeling that their livelihood is made through timber, and I think that they try to take care of what is there. If there's two or three trees standing in a bunch of little trees, two or three big trees that are merchantable, there's times that I'll walk off and leave them. Even if I'm contract logging and I'm supposed to take all the merchantable timber, I'll still leave a couple of trees to keep from tearing up, oh, a bunch of little regrowths.

Golden-crowned kinglet eating insects off fir tree

I think that any animal that is, that is using the land that you have, I don't think that you have the right to force him off of it. Because they don't hurt anything; really, they were here long before the rest of us were, or their, or some of their ancestors, and, uh, really they don't hurt a tree too much.

Logger on land

--You feel like you're sharing that land, rather than it being yours.

Well, oh, do share it. It's kind of desolate if you walk up there and you don't even see a deer track or a bear track or any kind of track at all.

* * *

Logger on his land

I'm logging on my own land here. And as I log it, I'm leaving trees that I think that, uh, are beautiful. I'm leaving enough thickets that will hold deer. I'm doing everything that I can to make this particular part of my

land fit along with the wildlife.

On flat by creek, flock of wild geese

I think that it's very necessary that a man share--the wild things need the land. They don't know anything about ownership, property lines, your, a man's desire to wrench a living out of the soil, and although I say it's my land--I have a title to it--it's theirs too, and maybe theirs more so than mine, so I try to share it with them.

Logger by roots of blown-down tree

Young tree growing out of stump

Man wants to run things according to the way he would like to see, and our forests in all the way they grew and came to be was the result of the grand, planned trial and, uh, fitting of nature. And man, he walked in and he says it's going to be this way. I, so this is why I believe that our forests as we found them are doomed. It's going to be something else.

* * *

Rain drops on needles of young fir tree

I wish we could've had a recording of what they looked like, you know, all these big trees standing there, you know, right now; but it's too late. Every little ways you'd go in a little draw or little canyon there'd be a beautiful spring--water--the most pure water in the world. Now, after all the forests are cut off, those springs are extinct--most of them are dried up. It just takes it out of the land. See, the water, trees held the water and the water would stay up for a long time. Now it comes in a whole bunch, floods everything, then it's gone. Maybe in time, if the second growth goes back--but then they'll cut that again.

* * *

Another tree reflected in drops

But the thing that you cannot overlook is that whenever a guy says: "I'm gonna, I want this tree, and I'll replace it." You take a look at the years that it took

Fir trees in ground fog

Single big tree emerging from fog

the tree to grow that that he wants to cut, and then realize that you can't replace that tree without an equal number of years. And I just doubt if they'll ever let them grow back again. So when they cut a tree down that's three hundred years old, uh, how many generations of people are going to go by before they see that tree again?

* * *

Sunset and moonrise over Three Sisters mountains.

Loggers have to cut it, that's their way of life. We need to cut timber, but we need to preserve some, too.

* * *

Credits

Sources

But you have to change patterns of thought in order to approach logging in a different manner. There are many ways that you can log a log, you know.

* * *

Sound of steam whistle

* * *

Production

--Well, one thing you said was that going to work in the woods right then at that time was your downfall.

Snow Peak loggers

Well, the reason why I say it was my downfall was because I never been able to go out and work at some other occupation and stay with it because I always got lonesome to go back to the woods--er, go back to loggin'.

* * *

The Loggers

Portraits

Early days I remember one time I went in town--the guy I was with was dressed up, but I had my old clothes on--and I remember a little girl. When we walked past them on the street, she said: "There goes two loggers." "No," she says, "one of 'em is a gentleman." (laughter)

* * *

We were coming home one night and I left water in my water bag, and I was just hopin' old Heavy'd shut his eyes. And he was sitting in the seat like that, you know--he's a big heavy man and made quite a pocket--and when he did shut his eyes I was right there pouring water, you know, in that depression--set the water bag down, you know. Old son of a gun, he just raised one eye, he just raised one eye, and he looked around. (laughs) Knew right where it come from. (laughs) Oh boy!

* * *

Logger as young man, middle-aged, and today

Hard life . . . but . . . I always liked it.

GLOSSARY

Logging Terms Used
in
NATURAL TIMBER COUNTRY

BELL. The socket that slides on the choker wire. When the choker wire is wrapped around one end of a log, the ferrule or nubbin on the end of the choker wire is socketed into the bell, which makes a metallic ringing sound: the "bell click." As the wire is pulled, the bell slides down and the log is tightly encircled. (See CHOKER.)

BOOMER. A term from the period around World War I for a logger who moved from camp to camp. Motivation varied, but it was said they were in search of the ideal job, boss, or cook house. Sometimes the boomer wasn't the one initiating the move. (See SLAVE MARKET.) The term "boomer" was replaced in the 1920's by "tramp logger." The boomer carried his bed roll with him, but tramp loggers did not because bedding was maintained in the camps in their time. Perhaps this was not a real improvement; it was said that incredible wildlife could be found in the bedding of some logging camps.

BLOWDOWN. Timber that has been blown down by the wind.

BUCKING. Sawing felled trees into logs. Bucking is a dangerous job because it is very difficult to tell what a log might do when it was completely cut through--it might just roll onto the bucker. This is probably the most unpredictable work in the woods.

BULL BUCK. The boss of the fallers and buckers. He looks over the standing timber in a unit and decides how it should be felled for minimum breakage and most efficient yarding.

BULL PUNCHER. The man who drove the bull teams used in logging. Bull teams were the primary source of power for yarding logs until the turn of the century. The bull puncher was famous for his wonderfully complex and sophisticated use of the English language; he could properly be called a poet, and most of his images were far superior to any currently in use.

CALKS. Short, heavy metal studs or spikes in the soles of logging boots to give greater sureness of footing while walking on logs. They ruined wood floors. The terms refers both to the spikes and to the boots that have them. It is pronounced and sometimes spelled "corks."

CHASER. In contemporary logging, the chaser unhooks the choker from the logs after they have arrived at the landing. In the days of ground lead yarding, the chaser literally chased (ran alongside) the turn of logs being yarded from the woods to the landing to make sure that the logs did not get hung up or that the dogs and chokers did not come loose. Sometimes, as the film shows, the chaser would ride these logs.

CHOKER. A short steel cable with a nubbin on one end and a bell that slides along the cable. The end with the nubbin is looped around a log and the nubbin is socketed into the bell. The other end is hooked to the butt rigging which is attached to the main line. When this line is pulled by the donkey or yarder, the choker cinches up tight "choking" the log. The weight of the log and the pull of the line keeps the choker tight as the log is yarded into the landing. The choker setter's job is to put the choker wire around the log--often he has to dig a hole underneath it--and to set the nubbin into the bell. This is a beginning job in a logging crew and a dangerous one. Sometimes a log will break loose while chokers are being set and start rolling. Also, the main line pulls tight with tremendous force, so the choker setter has to be out of the "bight" of the line when the signal is given to go ahead. Another danger

is that other logs may be knocked loose by the logs being yarded and start rolling down the hillside.

CONK. The exterior woody growth of a fungus that lives on dead areas of trees. Conks look a little like a conch shell protruding shelf-like from a tree; they are dark and rounded above but flat and white below. A conk on a tree does not mean that it is totally rotten; it may be rotten only in the area of the conk and have mostly good wood left in it. Although trees with a conk are felled now, in the early days loggers left a "conky" tree standing. Since there were so many trees, only the best ones were wanted, and instructions were to not fell those with conks. (See the story in the text about nailing a conk on a tree.)

DOG. A sharp metal stake or hook with an eye in the blunt end for attaching a line or chain. In yarding with oxen and early ground lead donkey engines, logs would be connected or "dogged" together by driving dogs into the sides of the logs at each end and linking the dogs with a line or chain. On river drives, when a log was grounded in shallow water or on dry land, a dog with a line connecting it to a horse team was driven into the log by the doggers. The log was then pulled out into deep water and when it floated free the dog was knocked free ("tripped") by the tripper who was on the log.

DONKEY. An engine powered by steam, diesel, gas, or electricity with drums for holding wire cables and used for hauling (yarding) logs from the woods to the landing, loading logs, and handling equipment in the woods. The cables would be attached to the logs either by dogs or chokers and as the spool turned, winding the cable onto it, the logs were pulled into the area near the donkey--the landing--from where they could be transported to the mill. The first donkey was a small steam engine with a ship's capstan for winding the rope used at that time. This was known as a Dolbeer (for the man who invented it) or a vertical spool donkey. The origin of the term

"donkey" is somewhat in doubt: some people say that it was from a traditional sailor's term for this engines used with a capstan aboard ship, and some say that its name was based on the temperament of the machine. There have been many improvements in the design of donkeys since they were first patented for logging use in the Northwest woods in 1883. Donkeys were attached to huge wooden sleds and could be moved over land by having a tree serve as an anchor for one end of the line which, when wound onto the spool, pulled the donkey toward the tree. Very few donkeys on sleds exist in the woods today. The man who ran this machine was called the donkey puncher. At the present the machine that hauls the logs to the landing is generally called a yarder and is moved by trucks.

GO TO TOWN. To be fired. In the highball era when a logger was fired he would have to go to the slave markets in the bigger cities to find or buy another job. However, going to town "to get your teeth fixed" was a whole different matter.

GOAD STICK. In oxen logging, a stick that had a nail driven into one end and filed to a point. Bull punchers used goad sticks to train the oxen and force them to pull harder by jamming the point in above the oxen's shoulders. Since this was painful, the point was supposed to be limited to about a quarter-inch in length; however, many were made longer but had washers on them so the point would extend only a quarter inch. In a tough situation the washers could be removed and extra pulling power obtained. Bull punchers varied in the degree to which they relied on goad sticks, but generally voice commands were used to motivate bulls in everyday work. (See BULL PUNCHER.)

GROUND LEAD. Yarding logs by dragging them flat across the ground. This was the first style of mechanized yarding. Although it was faster than using oxen or horses, the line and logs had a tendency to hang up on rocks and stumps. This was minimized as much as

possible by "sniping" the ends of big logs; that is, beveling the edges so that they would be more likely to ride up over an obstruction.

HEAD RIGGER. The use of this term varies. It can refer to a man who sets the rigging in a spar tree, or to the foreman of the rigging crew, but generally refers to the head rigging slinger: the second man under the hooktender and the man over the choker setters.

HIGHBALL. To move fast. A highball camp or outfit expected the men to work very fast and this often meant taking risks. The highball era began with the introduction of power machinery, continued during the manpower surplus period and seemed to peak in the 1930's. "Highball"--usually two sharp blasts of the whistle--was the signal to the donkey puncher to haul in the logs full speed. The logger's definition of a highball outfit: if a man was killed on the job, the boss would not shut down to take the body into camp; he would have another logger jump in to take the dead man's place and leave the body lying there while the work continued.

HIGH LEAD. The procedure of yarding logs by running the main line--the line that pulls the logs into the landing--through a block at the top of a spar tree. This gives lift to the near end of the log so that it would be more likely to ride over rocks and stumps without getting hung up. High lead was the next development after ground lead and became prevalent in the 'teens. It is still the cheapest, fastest, and most common method of yarding. But spar trees have virtually disappeared from the woods, being replaced by yarders with portable steel towers. (For a detailed discussion of some of the variations on the basic high lead, see N. C. Brown, Logging--Transportation.)

HOMEGUARD. A logger who worked at one camp for a long time, not a

compliment. Depending on the particular camp, homeguarding could mean working for an outfit for two weeks, two months, or two years. The homeguard was usually a family man. With the development of truck logging, he was the first to live in town. He was the opposite of the tramp logger.

HOMESTEADING. In the early days of settling this region (about the middle of the nineteenth century), timber covered much of the land. In order to clear it for agriculture, the trees were burned down by drilling a hole in the tree and stuffing live coals into the hole. Eventually the tree would be felled and then burned. Some of the biggest timber was destroyed in this process because there were no markets and no means of transporting it.

HOOKTENDER. The boss of a logging side. He was in charge of the yarding crew (rigging slinger, choker setters and, at one time, the whistle punk) and the landing crew (donkey puncher, chaser and loaders). Also called the hooker.

JACK SCREW. A tool for moving logs around on the ground using human power. It had a bar that could be raised and lowered by gears attached to a handle and a rachet. The bar had a dog in the end that would sink into the log. A jack screw would be put against the log; the handle would be cranked raising the bar and pushing the log so that eventually the log would roll. Some jack screws had the lifting power of forty men. Jack screws were used at one time to jack large logs on and off railroad cars and to rescue logs from hang-ups in yarding. They were also used in hand logging: if the ground was steep enough, bucked logs could be jacked into a position where they would slide downhill, usually into a river, where they could be floated to a mill. (See the text in the ground lead section for a description of another use of jack screws.)

MULLIGAN. A crew carrier. Originally it referred to an open railroad car that hauled the loggers back and forth between the woods

and the camp. Sometimes flat cars with roofs and boxcars were used. This word was also used at first for the trucks and buses that replaced railroad cars, but now the term "crummy" has replaced it. Since loggers always seemed to have a little bit of energy left for the ride back into camp or into town, especially on Friday night, the mulligan was often in an uproar with friendly fights and practical jokes.

OLD GROWTH. Virgin timber, that is, timber on land not previously logged that has been allowed to grow to maturity. Old growth Douglas fir might be from 300 to 700 years old. Second growth refers to timber growing on land once logged; it usually is immature when cut. Second growth could be allowed to grow to maturity and become as old as old growth.

PASS BLOCK. In high lead logging, a small block carried by the rigger or high climber up the spar tree. It was used for lifting the big yarding block (the bull block) and other rigging equipment to the top of the tree.

PEAVEY. A tool used for moving logs by hand, especially in breaking log jams on river drives. It had about a six-foot, heavy handle and a spike at the end with a free-swinging hook. The log was grasped by the hook and the spike, then by pushing on the peavey's handle, leverage was applied to the log. A similar tool, the cant hook, was slightly smaller, lighter, and did not have the spike. It was used for moving small logs, generally on the landing.

RIGGING CREW. The men who handle the rigging in yarding, not the men who rig up the spar tree.

SET OF FALLERS. A pair of fallers. In the days of hand-powered crosscut saws ("misery whips"), two men were needed to fall a tree. In the present era of gasoline-powered chain saws this term means a faller and bucker working together.

SETTING. An area where the trees are to be felled, bucked up, and yarded into one landing.

SIDE. A yarding and loading crew plus their equipment. Sometimes fallers and buckers are included in the term. Sides were often described by the kind of equipment or style of logging; for example, high lead side, skidder side, or cat side. A big camp would have more than one side, although they all might be of the same kind, and there would often be a boss of the sides (the side rod) who would be over the hook tenders and responsible to the superintendent. Sometimes a man would work on different sides in the same camp. The story is told in the film about the boss asking the logger: "Do you want to go on the other side today?" "Which side is that?" "Burnside!" Burnside was a famous Portland, Oregon street of slave markets and logger's saloons; thus, the man was being fired.

SKIDS. Small logs set in rows in the ground perpendicular to the line of haul and with V-shaped notches in the center. They made skid roads along which logs were pulled by bull teams and horse teams. Skids kept the logs from getting hung up in dirt and mud. The skid greaser had to run along behind the team and in front of the logs putting grease or sometimes water in the notches to help the logs slide easier.

SLAVE MARKET. Commercial employment offices run for private profit. They were usually located on the "skid roads" of bigger towns. The logging companies would inform the slave market of the jobs available and loggers would pay the slave market to be assigned a job, with the better the job the higher the payment. All available jobs were supposed to be posted, but usually the best jobs were kept "under the table" and had to be negotiated for. The slave market was supposed to be independent of the companies but sometimes the logger's fee would be split between the the slave market and the logging companies. And sometimes the logger would

have to pay twice for his job: once to the slave market and again to the company when he got to his new job. Thus, there was a lot of motivation for the companies to increase the turnover of personnel in the logging camps, especially when there were a lot of men looking for work. Men would be fired for no reason other than that the logging company might have an agreement with the slave market to send up a new crew from which they also would collect. The loggers who were fired would be forced to go back to the slave market and buy new jobs, but the same thing might happen to them again in a few weeks. A lot of the logger's wages were consumed in fees for a new job. Some camps were very active: "They had three crews going all the time: one crew working, one coming in, and one going out." This was the abuse of the men that led to the original success of the Wobblies.

SPAR POLE, SPAR TREE. In high lead logging, the tree used to hang rigging in at the top so that the main line would give lift to the end of the log. Before the rigging was hung in it, the tree had to be limbed and topped. At first (in the 'teens) this was done by men using springboards to climb the tree. They took two boards, stood on one while chopping a notch for the second, placed it in the higher notch, jumped up on it and chopped the next higher notch, and then, reaching down, pulled the lower board out with their axe. This technique of tree climbing was risky because they were balancing on the springboards at heights up to 200 feet and when the top fell it would make the tree sway. Topping trees from springboards lasted for less than one season; very quickly they began using spurs and a rope.

SPLITTING. Used in the film to describe a danger in topping a spar tree. Sometimes the weight of the top would force the trunk to split down. If the trunk spread apart far enough, and the high climber was not able to get down the tree below the split in time, the expanding top could just snap his rope. Or if his rope was tied around behind him, as the trunk split and expanded it would

pull the rope tight and cut him in two.

SPRINGBOARD, 'BOARD. Springboards were generally 2 by 8's, five feet long, and had a horseshoe-like iron in one end. Notches were cut with axes in a tree that was to be felled and the springboard was placed in the notch with the hook of the iron up. When the faller was on the board his weight held the springboard in the tree. They were used by fallers in the days of hand-powered crosscut saws to gain level footing as well as to get above the butt of the tree which was much bigger than the trunk and usually had more pitch in it. Fallers could swing the springboard around in the notch by jumping in the direction they wanted to go and pulling the board around with their foot. Springboards have disappeared from the woods today. Power saws have a tendency to kick and could knock a man off a board. Also, the butt is more important now and easier to cut with power saws. In addition, the second growth trees are much smaller than the big-butted old growths. (See SPAR POLE.)

SPURS, CLIMBING OUTFIT. Spurs were thin sharp spikes that were strapped to the leg and used for climbing spar trees that were to be topped. The spurs extended below the boot on the inside of the legs and would sink into the bark as the high climber went up the tree. A climbing outfit consisted of spurs, a heavy belt on which the topping saw, axe, and other tools were tied, and a one-inch steel core manilla rope tied to the belt. As the climber went up the tree he frequently retied the rope as the tree's diameter got smaller. Coming down a tree wearing spurs was a different procedure from going up; it is described in the text.

STUMP RIG. A way of rigging the main line for yarding that was the transition between ground lead and high lead. Realizing that getting some lift on the end of a log when yarding would help it ride over hang-ups and get it in faster, early loggers at

first tried putting a block on a high stump and passing the main line through it. These stumps had been springboarded and cut about 20-40 feet off the ground, but this was still not enough height so the next step was to go higher and make spar trees. Stump rigs could probably be dated in the early 'teens, but apparently did not occur in all camps.

THOUSANDS, (CONTRACTED). A thousand board feet is a basic measuring unit of timber and logs. Working by the thousands (also called "by the bushel" or "contracted") means being paid for falling timber, bucking, yarding, and hauling logs by the thousands of board feet handled. Being paid by the thousands was common in the 'thirties, and a man working fast was said to be "busheling." At some camps where the yarding crew was paid on a contracted basis, they would get a bonus for logs gotten in over a certain amount of thousands of board feet, and if the head riggers and side rods also got an additional bonus, there was a lot of pressure on the men to work extra fast and hard. As a result, risks were taken and a lot of men were hurt or killed.

TIMBER BEAST. An old term for the man who works in the woods: the logger. He was a very different type from mill workers: the "sawdust savages." There was a great deal of pride in the term timber beast, but a man not working in the woods would be better off not using it.

TIN COATS, TIN PANTS. Water repellent heavy canvas jackets and pants made waterproof by the logger or his wife melting paraffin into them. They were so stiff they would stand up by themselves. (It was said that socks would too, but not for the same reason.) Now loggers wear slickers.

TOPPING. To cut the top off a spar tree.

TRAMP LOGGER. A logger who moved from camp to camp. A positive term,

it describes most of the loggers in the highball era. Individuals may have had personal reasons for being tramp loggers--searching for different things--but it was also part of the culture of logging and was encouraged by the camps at the time. The tradition of tramp loggers has disappeared in the Pacific Northwest along with the disappearance of the camps, but it is said that it still continues in Alaska. (See HOMEGUARDING and SLAVE MARKET.)

UNIT. An area with timber to be felled and bucked. (See BULL BUCK.)

WEDGE. In falling and bucking, wedges are used to keep the tree from pinching the saw and to force the tree to lean in the desired direction of fall. Originally made of steel, they are now mostly plastic.

WHISTLE. A whistle on steam donkeys was used for communication in the woods. It became necessary when the yarding crew began working at such great distances from the donkey puncher that voice communication was no longer possible. A logger's first job in the woods was usually that of whistle punk. This was the lowest status job, usually held by a boy. The whistle punk worked with the yarding crew and was responsible for pulling a wire attached to the whistle. When the hook tender gave him a signal, he would jerk the wire blowing the whistle. The number of times he blew it told the donkey puncher what to do: go ahead fast, go ahead slow, stop, etc. The whistle could be heard for long distances in the woods and no one wanted to hear the signal that meant a man was hurt. The hook tender and yarder engineer now communicate by electronic systems.

WOBBLIES, (IWW). Members of the Industrial Workers of the World, a militant, radical union organization active around World War I and very strong among the loggers. Much negative misinformation continues to be published in the popular press about them. The

Wobblies were concerned with issues of labor practices, conditions in the camps, and free speech. While not all loggers were actually members, most of the old time loggers have a great deal of respect for them because the Wobblies were very effective in eliminating some of the abuses of men and in making life in the camps a little more humane. Because Wobblies were considered by some to be a threat to social and economic tranquility, a number of their members were massacred during the height of their activity. But the fact that most loggers supported the Wobblies gave them a power beyond their numbers and the "wobbly horrors" (the threat of Wobbly organizing) was often enough by itself to institute important changes in hiring practices and camp life. (See SLAVE MARKET.) As economic and social conditions changed, their power in the woods diminished and finally died out. (See Robert L. Tyler, Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest.)

YARDING. The process of transporting bucked-up logs from where they were bucked to a landing, which is a central location from which they are taken to a mill. Yarding began with oxen and horses dragging the logs; then steam donkeys yarded using, first, ground lead and, later, high lead systems; now it is done by diesel yarders, cats, baloons, and helicopters.

YOKE. A team of two oxen. This word also referred to the wooden device holding them together side by side. Thus, a five-yoke team was made up of ten oxen.

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See also: Forest History (Journal of the Forest History Society), and articles by Paul Reppeto in past issues of Loggers World.

Oldsters put poetry into film on logging

By TED MAHAR
of The Oregonian staff

Springfield film maker Ron Finne has made a kind of poetic documentary about logging that is 53 minutes well spent. But because it is about the recently vanished romance of old-time Oregon logging, it is doubly worth seeing. And if you want to take a chance on it, the Portland Art Museum will screen it Friday, Aug. 11 at 8 p.m. for an inexpensive sum which will help the inchoate Northwest Film Study Center get started.

Finne's film is about half-composed of old tintypes, postcards and a surprising number of old films showing logging the way it was. Those old days are gone forever, just like the huge trees, the likes of which will never be seen again outside of small, protected areas, and not many of those.

The film is so simple and straightforward that one might easily overlook the meticulous skill involved in matching the narration to the pictures, for there is no narrator in the conventional sense, but a series of taped interviews with old-timers who remember what logging was like.

Finne has taken their rambling but richlyd etailed reminiscences and applied them carefully to scenes showing what the men are describing, providing a doubly enchanting evocation of an era which was nasty, grubby and dangerous at thet ime and seems oddlyr omantic now.

But perhaps the most brilliant stroke of all was Finne's decision to interview at least some of these old loggers in a big group, letting their conversation flow by itself. Like any small, exclusive group, loggers have a language slightly different from norm. Their vocabulary is full of words with meanings different than to the layman. There is a rhythk and a dry, pithy humor that is theirs alone. "Two nice rides a day, and a picnic lunch. Who could ask for more," one says with cheerful cynicism.

This rich language very well might not have come out in individual interviews, for the interviewee would instinctively adjust his speech to more conventional modes. But, talking among themselves, the loggers let the language flow, producing a kind of rough-hewn poetry that is completely unconscious; even without the images, the interviews would be worth listening to.

Image sensitivity

But the images, too, are strung together by a sensitive hand. For one thing, Finne uses an unusual color process that is perhaps merely a product of filming on rainy and cloudy days; at any rate, the colors seem paradoxically both muted and rich.

He has also given his film a somewhat ironic title. It is called "Natural Timber Country," but there are strong undertones of protest over the fact that the great stands are just no longer with us.

It is far from a bitter film, though. It is an appreciation of a permanently gone world, yet it is far more than sentimental nostalgia. It is, for one thing, a reminder that Oregon has a romantic heritage that is as remote from us as the Japanese tea ceremony is to young Japanese.

The dangers routinely faced in the woods in the old days seem downright exotic now, but they were commonplace then. As one man remembers, when a choker setter was killed in some camps, they didn't even stop work to bring his body out, but just brought it down with the portable equipment at the end of the shift. Another recalls that occasionally he stepped into a job left unfinished because a man had just been killed doing it.

'Majesty is gone'

Those old timers may not have seemed like romantics at the time, and maybe they weren't, but one of them laments that the "majesty is gone," now that the big trees are gone and he misses that "cathedral quality" the woods used to have.

There is still some "cathedral quality" left, though, and Finne has a few shots that border on abstract art and others that suggest some of the mystery implicit in the phrase "the forest primeval." You can't replace a 200 or 400-year-old tree with a tree farm plant only 35 years old, one of the old loggers complains. Maybe, for purely industrial purposes, you can. But for deeper, perhaps cultural reasons, you can't, and Finne helps the old-timers convince us that we missed out on something pretty big.

The Environment Film Review

***A72-00402 Natural Timber Country**

This is a film about logging, about the way it was in the days before power saws, diesel-powered trucks, and angry unions. Ron Finne, an independent filmmaker who specializes in environmental subjects, has assembled scores of still photos and early filmstrips which give the viewer a keen sense of what logging camp life was like in the first decade of the 20th century. While these historical slides and tinted-images flash across the screen, retired loggers recount the episodes of danger and death that marked their careers. Close-ups of the old prints reveal the grizzled faces and lanky bodies of these woodsmen who risked their lives every day. Working in such proximity to death, the men shared a sort of gallows camaraderie with the trees they felled.

Something intangible, some notion of oneness with nature, has evaporated in present-day logging operations. For a moment at least, that vanished feeling is recaptured and expressed by "Natural Timber Country."

The Environment Film Review® is published annually by Environment Information Center, Inc., Film Reference Dept. 124 East 39th St., New York, N.Y. 10016.

NATURAL TIMBER COUNTRY has been seen by thousands of people in many places around the world: in homes of loggers; in grange halls; at professional foresters' meetings; at the Portland Art Museum, San Francisco Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art; in forestry, history, American studies and environmental studies programs in American universities; on commercial and educational television in Oregon and California; and on Swedish and Belgian national television.